

## A SHORT HISTORY OF ST. PETER'S CHURCH, BOLTON-LE-MOORS BOLTON PARISH CHURCH

The antiquity of the site upon which is built the church of St. Peter, Bolton-le-Moors, can be indicated by the discovery in 1868 of fragments of three Anglo-Saxon carved stone crosses. One of the crosses, almost complete, is said by some experts to be from a period between 800 and 950 A.D.

Bolton and its church is not mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. In common with a number of Hundreds in these parts only a few place names are given and the general statement made that "21 thanes had held 21 manors" in the Hundred of Salford in 1066. Bolton was almost certainly one of these manors, since by the 1600's it was second only in size to Manchester in the hundred.

Possibly the earliest written evidence of a church at Bolton is the mention of " Ellis, Clerk of Boelton" in the Pipe Rolls of Henry II which are the court records of the King's Justices held at Lancaster in 1184/85. "Jordan, Dean of Mamcestre" and "Robert, Archdeacon of Cestre" are also named at this time.

Roger de Maresay, who held the Manor of Bolton in 1180, also founded the Priory of Mattersey in Nottinghamshire about the year 1185. It is not surprising therefore to find that the "right of patronage" of the church of Bolton was held by the Prior and Convent of Mattersey until the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. This Gilbertine priory of nuns and canons was an offshoot of the English monastic order of St. Gilbert of Sempringham, Lincolnshire, which was given papal approval in 1149.

A number of documents held in Lichfield Record Office show that the church of Bolton was made a prebend of the Church of Lichfield (Cathedral) and later annexed to the Archdeaconry of Chester. An early reference to Bolton church as a prebend of Lichfield appears in the statutes of Bishop Hugh de Nonant, 1185 to 1198.

The documents show that the tithes of the parish were payable to the Archdeacon of Chester who held the prebend of Bolton and from these tithes, payments would be made to the Priory and to the Cathedral. The Vicar would be nominated by the Prior and Chapter of Matersay and instituted by the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry. The Archdeacon of Chester had the right to lease out the tithes for a period of years and a number of local families such as the Levers of Great Bolton, the Tyldesleys of Morley Hall and the Andertons of Lostock Hall held the Prebend (or Rectory) for many years. Indeed the Levers had a long legal wrangle with the Archdeacon over the lease of the prebend.

In the year 1541, Henry VIII created the see of Chester out of the ancient see of Lichfield and at the same time granted the Prebend of Bolton to the newly created Bishop of Chester. Bolton parish remained within the area of the Diocese of Chester until the formation of the Diocese of Manchester in 1847, the patronage being henceforth in the hands of the successive Bishops of Manchester.

In 1984 it was announced that a See of Bolton was to be created and that the Rt. Rev. David Galliford would become its first bishop.

The evidence shows that the present structure is at least the third church on this site. Fragments of anglo-saxon and early norman stone carvings in addition to the crosses were discovered on the demolition of the old parish church in 1866 and appear to belong to much earlier times. These are all that remain of the earlier church buildings and are to be seen on display inside the church and in local museums.

The old church, from its architectural style, dated from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, but due to structural decay and inadequacy, it was replaced by the present Victorian gothic building at a cost of £45,000; the gift of Peter Ormerod, a local cotton manufacturer.

The new building was consecrated on St. Peter's Day, June 29<sup>th</sup> 1871, by James Fraser the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bishop of Manchester.

The old parish of Bolton-le-Moors covered a wide area including the townships of: Great Bolton, Little Bolton, Tonge with Haulgh, Darcy Lever, Little Lever, Breightmet, Harwood, Bradshaw, Quarlton, Edgworth, Entwistle, Turton, Longworth, Sharples, Rivington, Anglezark, Blackrod and Lostock. Most of the remainder of the present borough was included in the neighbouring parish of Deane (part of the large parish of Eccles prior to 1541). Great Lever, rather surprisingly, along with Ainsworth was a detached part of the parish of Middleton.

### **The Registers**

Go back to 1587. The oldest book was hidden during the Civil War and "lost" for 180 years until it was discovered under a stone slab beneath the Lecturer's stall. During a plague in 1623, 452 burials took place. In 1632-4 there appear long lists of parishioners excommunicated for non-payment of tithes and dues. The Parish Clerk of 1632 wrote his own impish introduction to the marriage entries:

This part conteynes the marryed state  
With most there followes quick debate  
If fortune smile then are the(y) glad  
If not, they greeve the(y) weare so madd.      p.me.Ro: Welsh.

For the burials he was inclined to piety:

This part of Booke it doth conteyne  
Those dead, yet sure, must ryse again  
There names thow sees, and soe have I;  
Then letts prepare us both to dye.

Eighteenth-century entries include the marriages of both Richard Arkwright and Samuel Crompton, famed for their cotton-spinning inventions. There are many other interesting historical records and documents. The mark of its seventeenth-century history still rests on Bolton. As a stronghold of Puritanism, the town was besieged three times during the Civil War, and as a consequence of the 'massacre' of 1644 by the Royalist forces under Prince Rupert and Lord Derby, the names of 78 townspeople are recorded in the burial registers. An estimated 1500 lost their lives in the battle many being unknown soldiers of both sides. After his capture and trial at Chester in 1651 Lord Derby was sentenced to be beheaded at the Market Cross in Churchgate,

Bolton. The Okey tombstone, sited outside the south wall of the Chapel, gives a plaintive and exaggerated account of these disturbed days: "John Okey the servant of God was borne in London in 1608. Came into this town 1629. Married Mary the daughter of James Crompton of Breightmet 1635 with whom he lived comfortably 20 years and begot 4 sons and 6 daughters. Since then he lived sole till the day of his death. In this time there were many Great Changes and terrible alterations 18 years civil wars in England besides many dreadful sea fights. The Crown or Command of England changed 8 times episcopacy laid aside 14 yeares London burnt by Papists and more stately built againe Germany wasted 300 miles 200,000 protestants murdered in Ireland by the papists. This towne thrice stormed once taken and plundered. He went thorow many troubles and divers conditions. Found rest joy and happiness only in holiness and faith feare and love of God in Jesus Christ. He Dyed the 29 of Ap and lieth here buried 1684. Come Lord Jesus o come quickly".

John Okey was a relative of Richard Goodwin, who together with Robert Park, Lecturer, was ejected as Vicar of Bolton in 1662 for refusing to comply with the Act of Uniformity. This led to the first Nonconformist meeting room in Mealhouse Lane, where Goodwin continued schismatic services.

The Lectureship of Bolton was founded in 1620 by James Gosnell, Curate, to guarantee the preaching of Puritan doctrine. Parson Folds, Lecturer of Bolton and Curate of Walmsley Chapel from 1755 to 1820, was a renowned 18<sup>th</sup> century character. James Slade, Vicar of Bolton and Canon of Chester (in which Diocese Bolton then was) from 1817 to 1856, made a notable contribution to the developing life of the nineteenth century town, founding amongst other institutions the Trustee Savings Bank in 1818, the Royal Infirmary in 1820, and the Bolton Church Institute (now the Canon Slade Grammar School) in 1846. He was famed nationally for his work in education. The Sunday School he built in 1819 had a regular attendance of 1400 pupils, and was a model for numerous others, both in the town and elsewhere. This building and the old Church Institute, existing on the perimeter of the churchyard, have now been demolished. The old Grammar School, rebuilt in 1880, remains, and has been acquired and renovated as a centre for Church purposes.